Transcendentalism: An Era of Groundbreaking Thinkers

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An avid reader and budding author I have always been interested in American literature. The same applies for psychology and anthropology. During Chapter 12, I learned the meaning of Transcendentalism from Mr. Holliday. After some light research I was fascinated by this complex subject and how it combines the topics of groundbreaking thinkers who in their own way created and lived out an original and unique philosophy, and the works of revolutionary literature they contributed to society along the way. Discovering their far-reaching impact on future authors and activists was just an added bonus. Other than hearing the names Emerson and Thoreau in passing I knew next to nothing about Transcendentalism before I began research. Really my only contact with the subject was through Whitman and Dickinson, both poets I’ve had the pleasure of reading, but about whom it could only be debated whether or not they were actually Transcendentalists.

While I will admit this project has been the most interesting and stimulating one so far to produce, it has also been the most difficult to research and bring together. After days of extensive fact gathering both on the internet and in textbooks, I was left overwhelmed and unsure of the specific origins, purpose, and impact of the Transcendental Movement, all topics I hoped to cover in my presentation. I used a broad range of web pages mainly college sites set up by professors and students studying Transcendentalism, but found refuge in the straightforward language of our U. S. History textbook. Even though I am embarrassed to admit it my most valuable sources were sites set up for a child’s introduction to philosophy such as [www.kidsphilosophyslam.org](http://www.kidsphilosophyslam.org) where a vast collection of links, project ideas, and helpful tips were offered, and topics like Thoreau and Emerson were broken down in a that children could understand them. My biggest research setback and it was a monstrous one as mentioned above, was sorting through hundreds of complicated websites chalk full of technical jargon and impossibly abstract concepts in an attempt to reach the core of my topic and its true influence on America instead of fifty interpretations of a complex form of Universalistic mysticism that may or may not of spurred it.

After finally gathering enough information to formulate an objective I knew I would need a visual aid that would allow me to break my presentation into at least three parts: the origins or leaders of Transcendentalism, their main works and contributions to the movement, and the impact they had on future generations. Thus, I concluded that a PowerPoint would be the best choice for the content I wished to present because it allowed me to separate key sections and ideas into individual slides for easier viewer comprehension. I spent at least a week on my visual aid and used both the U. S. History textbook and several cited websites in order to gain both facts and images that when tied together really make the presentation both sharp and enjoyable.

Just as the construction of railways and turnpikes revolutionized American transportation and allowed for growth and expansion of the population westward, the Transcendental Movement revolutionized American thought and essentially the literature that stemmed from those revelations. Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau created an expansion of American ideals that completely transformed the way people looked at the world, and in particular the human connection with nature. This enormous swell of new ideas and controversial thoughts flowed into a fresh and fast moving river of innovative and groundbreaking literature. For example, the works of Walt Whitman including his book length poems Song of Myself and When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d which both relate his experiences and discoveries in nature. Transcendentalism has even expanded the world of activism. Take the impact Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience had on Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. It could only be speculated if Dr. King would have been such an influential civil rights leader if he hadn’t read Thoreau’s plea for man to stand up peacefully against something they believed was wrong even if their protest would land them in jail. Throughout the mid 1800’s and beyond Transcendentalists spurred a renaissance of new ideas and inspired future generations to follow in their footsteps of individualism; through speeches, poems, essays, and books Transcendental revolutionaries expanded the ways of American thoughts and actions and proved that change takes just one.

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